

This year the journey was long, very long. 1150 km from my home, and Stefano had a hundred kilometres more. The thirteenth edition of Retroplane took place in Vauville, a nice village of 400 citizens, reaching 500 units during the meeting, seaward on the west coast of Normandy.

For this edition, Vincent Besançon desired to re-experience that “soul” of experimentation and unknown breathed during the pioneering meeting that took place on Twenties. So, he asked the modellers to prepare a model that had the maiden flight before the 1925.

Being aware that for those gliders the ready plans are all non-existent, Vincent announced the Vauville meeting at the end of the Wasserkuppe edition, in 2015. In this way the modellers had the possibility to choose the glider, to find the necessary documentation like 3-view drawings or old photos, to make the building plans, and specially to build the model! I started with the project of the G.P.1 from the eng. Cattaneo. Unfortunately I had to put it temporarily aside in favour of the usual Grunau Baby IIb. Like me, Stefano, at the beginning thought to build the Goliardia, but at the end he decided to fly with its Rhonbussard.

July, the 20th, very early morning, Stefano and I loaded the car on “Tetris World Championship” mode and started our journey toward France. The distribution belt of the car was replaced just the day before, but suddenly a thrilling light turned on. Something wrong in the engine. Luckily the car worked well, but if tried to accelerate the power missed... What to do? In some way we had to be to the meeting. We took the risk and we decided to go. We drove through Monte Bianco tunnel, then through Paris and finally toward Normandy.

France is a very beautiful country, and the panorama is very nice, but its highways are quite boring. Hundreds and hundreds of kilometres up and down to the hills and then, suddenly, we saw Paris. Due to a big traffic jam on the external ring of Paris, the navigator suggested us to pass through the centre of the town, giving us the possibility to see the famous Tour Eiffel. Out of the Paris, again hundreds and hundreds of kilometres like the previous one and then we arrived to Caen, where we actually started to breathe the air of Normandy.

During the last part of the journey we noticed that there were several indications for Juno Beach, Gold Beach, Omaha Beach, Utah Beach... They are the places of the D-Day, and immediately the scenes of the film “Save the Ryan soldier” popped up in my mind. We decided to think about them during the return trip, because our goal for that day was to arrive at the camping and mount the tent before the sunset.

We arrived to the camping in time, and we found a lot of other modellers that during these years become also friends. Vincent and Joelle received us warmly as usual, thanking us for the participation and reserving us a place of honour aside the tent of our friend Frédéric, a true pillar of the Retroplane.

On the streets near the camping, a lot of bushes shaped and bent by the wind captured my attention. Tenth of years constantly exposed to that wind, they seemed to be tied and pulled back by an invisible hand.

Once arrived to the camping we noticed that most part of the guest were wind surfers, and kite surfers. Only at that point we had the real first feeling, than the awareness, and finally the certainty that the invisible hand was named “Ocean wind”, and it never abandoned us for the following five days.

We started our trip from Novara, with a maximum temperature of over 34 degrees, but during our stay in Vauville we never seen 20 degrees. The weather left us really astonished. Sunny, calm wind, drizzle, wind gusts up to 50 km/h, rain, cloudy, showers and then sun again. All these conditions, in forty or fifty minutes, then

again and again... We noticed that most of the people there doesn't use the umbrella if rains. They are so used to this weather conditions that doesn't care if rains. Let me say, we are very lucky...

During the night, in the tent, with showers and wind gust, seemed to be in an industrial washer machine. Unforgettable experience! Then, on the last night we heard some strange noises, but we were too tired to investigate. Next morning we found out that a troop of moles dug the ground below our tent! Funny thing!

In those days the wind came constantly from the west, and the flying site was always "Les Pierre Pouquelées", a really nice slope at less than ten minutes from camping. A breath-taking panorama with really nice view on the Ocean, and infinite sweeps of heather, where we was able to gently lie down our models during the landing.

We flew all the days, morning and afternoon, until the sunset. The sky suddenly changed its look, passing from low, dark clouds ready to drop a lot of rain to flashes of light, producing light-dark effects that made the happiness of numerous photographers.

All the days ended to the local airport "Aérodrome de Vauville", dedicated to the soaring, where the President gave us the opportunity to use a nice room, warm and especially far from sudden showers.

As usual, on Saturday there was the exposure of fuselages, and the traditional parade of modellers with old fashioned dresses. We all had the possibility to admire real artistic woodworking, most of them never seen before because they have been built specially for this meeting.

After the exposure phase, the "eating" phase took places. We had the opportunity to taste very typical products coming from nine different nations. A personal special thanks to our Czech friend who gave us the chance to eat fantastic garlic sandwiches!

On Sunday there was the award of the usual "Nervure d'or", the golden rib that Vincent gave to who put strongest effort in the forum and building during the last year. This year Johannes Vannahme deserved this prize, from Germany, who build a perfect model of the "Stehaufchen Dresden D-B1" year 1921.

A special prize went to the most beautiful model, the best in show. The trophy offered by the Association Modeliste Velivole went to Vincent De Bode, who deserved this prize for the wonderful model of Fokker FG2 year 1922.

There were a lot of really beautiful models in this edition, it is impossible to name each of them, but the photos will do them justice.

And now there is the sad part of the meeting. Vincent, after having organized with dedication and strong effort thirteen editions of Retroplane, he decided to "be retired", to start to think a little more to his hobby and his models, without the organization responsibility of the next Retroplane edition. So, the next year the meeting won't take place.

To organize a so huge meeting, it's not enough to say: organize it on this or that slope, but it's necessary to try it more than one year before the meeting, then it has to be quite close to the camping in order to don't ask to the pilots to cover too much road, it must have a big park suitable to accommodate cars and camper vans. And, on top of all this, the slope must ensure the wind conditions and give the chance to fly with all the wind directions. There's a huge work behind...

Ask to Stefano which was the effort he put to organize the last meeting in Polska, although with the help and support of all the other local and foreign modellers. Then, if you consider that this meeting touched several European states, it's easy to understand that it's a hard task.

At the end of the meeting Vincent, with the tears on his eyes, asked to have more time to pledge for him, for his family and his models, wishing that somebody could pick up his call to organize as soon as possible the next edition of the Retroplane.

The premises are there; all the participants don't want to give up to this wonderful meeting. So, don't despair, Retroplane isn't death, cheer Retroplane!

During the return trip, as promised, we decided to have a stop and visit some of the historical places related to the D-Day. In Utah Beach there is a spectacular museum that I advise to visit. Inside this museum, a true B26 bomber is hosted, perfectly restored. A visit is mandatory for who wants to reproduce this aircraft.

Then we moved toward Omaha Beach. On the beach there are still some old German defensive walls that can be visited together with several monuments in memory of what's happened.

Not far from Omaha Beach there is the American Cemetery with its impressive D-Day Memorial, the same seen in the Steven Spielberg film. It has been an unforgettable experience.

Very tired but very happy we headed towards home, aware of even this year we had the chance to take part to a meeting that in Europe it's one of a kind, not only for the high level of participating models, but also for the level of modellers!

Waiting the next edition of Retroplane, I wish you good flights and happy landings!

Link:

<http://www.retroplane.net/retroplane2017/>

<http://www.retroplane.net/forum/viewtopic.php?t=4590>